United Nations A/72/809/Add.1

General Assembly

Distr.: General
28 March 2018

Original: English

Seventy-second session
Agenda item 142
Joint Inspection Unit

Results-based management in the United Nations development system: analysis of progress and policy effectiveness

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Results-based management in the United Nations development system: analysis of progress and policy effectiveness" (see A/72/809).

18-04954 (E) 130418

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Summary

In its report entitled "Results-based management in the United Nations development system: analysis of progress and policy effectiveness" (see A/72/809), the Joint Inspection Unit examined the progress made in the implementation of results-based management practices, building on the previous reports on the same topic issued in 2004 and 2012. The report is based on data collected in 2015 and early 2016 and focuses on the results-based management policy element as defined in General Assembly resolutions 67/226 and 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.

The present note reflects the views of organizations of the United Nations system on the recommendations provided in the report. The views have been consolidated on the basis of inputs provided by member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which welcomed the report and supported some of its conclusions.

I. Introduction

1. In its report entitled "Results-based management in the United Nations development system: analysis of progress and policy effectiveness" (see A/72/809), the Joint Inspection Unit addressed the conceptual and technical challenges of results-based management, as well as their underlying causes, and the structural, systemic and political constraints on the implementation of results-based management. Some of the constraints have already been the subject of debate in the United Nations system, leading to the adoption of new resolutions on governance in the 2016 review cycle and to the Secretary-General's reforms in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In its review, the Unit takes a cross-cutting, system-wide view with the aim of helping the United Nations system to further enhance the relevance and value of its results-based management system in support of the 2030 Agenda.

II. General comments

2. The organizations of the United Nations system commend the Joint Inspection Unit for having produced a comprehensive report on results-based management in the United Nations development system and recognize the benefits of working coherently and being accountable for results, while taking measures to increase outward engagement and coherence with stakeholders outside the United Nations system and various implementation partners, in order to contribute effectively to broader efforts at the country level.

3. The organizations recognize that the most compelling findings presented in the report are those that detail the challenges and constraints of system-wide operations and of meeting the demands of results-based management, even though some organizations are not entirely convinced of the link between those findings and the recommendations.

4. The organizations further recognize that results-based management is at different implementation stages in the different organizations of the United Nations system and that the nature of support and guidance required by each organization may be different.

5. The organizations note the benefits of aligning the report with the broader United Nations system-wide instruments for measuring, monitoring and reporting on results, as outlined in the report of the Secretary General entitled "Repositioning the United Nations development system to deliver on the 2030 Agenda: our promise for dignity, prosperity and peace on a healthy planet" (A/72/684-E/2018/7) and its annex.

III. Specific comments on recommendations

Recommendation 1

Executive heads who have not already done so should develop a well-defined, comprehensive and holistic strategy to guide the mainstreaming of results-based management within and across organizations.

6. The organizations generally support this recommendation, although some note that, while it is difficult to dispute the potential benefits of organizations' adopting a strong results-based management strategy, it is not apparent from the report that the existence of a strategy is, in and of itself, transformative. As noted in the report, only one entity was found to have such a strategy, therefore making it difficult to ascertain

that having such a strategy is critical to results-based management. Similarly, it is worth noting that the existence of a strategy (in accordance with the recommendation) does not necessarily lead to the allocation of resources or capacity or provide the institutional will to implement the strategy.

7. The organizations also note that this recommendation may be particularly relevant for those organizations that are at the beginning of their maturity curve in terms of the implementation of results-based management. For organizations that are more advanced in this regard, the implementation of the recommendation would involve "retrofitting" only.

8. In the case of the United Nations Secretariat, results-based management is considered essential to changing the focus of the Organization from processes and activities to outputs and results and to holding senior management and staff at all levels accountable for their delivery, as outlined by the Secretary-General in his report entitled "Shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: ensuring a better future for all" (A/72/492) and in the seventh progress report on the accountability system in the United Nations Secretariat, which is being prepared for consideration by the General Assembly during the second resumed part of its seventy-second session.

Recommendation 2

Executive heads, including the Secretary-General in his capacity as Chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), should consider establishing a backbone support function to ensure that the vast range of innovations introduced in results-based management across the United Nations system are captured, supported, assessed for value and shared for adoption system-wide.

9. The organizations are partially supportive of this recommendation, notwithstanding the fact that results-based management is at different implementation stages across the United Nations system and that entities therefore have different needs.

10. The organizations also note that informal networks already exist in which good practices on results-based management experiences are shared system-wide (e.g. through the United Nations strategic planning network). Furthermore, the organizations underscore their preference for retaining a certain level of discretion in developing and maintaining unique systems and tools for results-based management that are best suited to the operating contexts and capacities of the individual entities.

Recommendation 3

Executive heads should strengthen the development of the culture of results by including in their respective capacity development agenda a focus on enhancing the mindset and value systems that are important for enhancing staff commitment and engagement in implementing results-based management.

11. The organizations support this recommendation and note the well-established role of leadership in fostering a culture of results-based management within an organization. They also recognize that fostering senior-level leadership is fundamental to the successful implementation of results-based management.

12. For this purpose, the Secretary-General is proposing, in the action plan on results-based management to be included in the seventh progress report on the accountability system in the United Nations Secretariat, a high-level advocacy and outreach campaign to promote results-based management and to incorporate in the senior managers' compacts a performance indicator assessing the contribution of

senior managers to the implementation of results-based management. The Secretary-General is also proposing to create a link between the performance assessments of senior managers and staff at all levels and organizational performance with the aim of effectively promoting a culture of results across the United Nations Secretariat.

Recommendation 4

Executive heads should ensure that the future development of approaches to staff accountability and human resources management incorporate more consideration of managing for achieving results, including the development of incentive systems that promote both accountability for results and accountability for transformative learning and innovations at all levels.

13. The organizations support this recommendation. Some organizations, namely the United Nations Secretariat, the World Health Organization and the World Tourism Organization, reported ongoing plans to strengthen individual accountability for results and to link them to the achievement of the objectives and results of the organizations.

Recommendation 5

Executive heads should make the use of information on results, including evidence resulting from evaluations, a strategic priority.

14. The organizations support this recommendation. In the case of the United Nations Secretariat, the Secretary-General views the ability of the Secretariat to conduct proper self-evaluations and to actively include lessons learned in the programme planning and budgeting process of the Organization as essential elements for the implementation of results-based management.

Recommendation 6

Legislative bodies may wish to work with heads of organizations to enhance the focus on managing for results beyond the demand for accountability and reporting to give a greater focus on what works, what does not work and why, and do so with due regard to context.

15. The organizations generally support this recommendation, noting the importance of considering any changes in the role of legislative bodies, taking into account the specificity and diversity of governance arrangements across the system with regard to this kind of oversight and the critical feedback provided by programme countries in determining "what works".

Recommendation 7

The Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chair of CEB, should request inter-agency bodies working on accountability reforms to conceptualize and develop a collective accountability framework that is fit for collective impact, as required for results-based management and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

16. The organizations generally support the objective of this recommendation, although they underscore how their respective governing bodies weigh priorities differently, as well as the priority of each of the components in their accountability frameworks. While the United Nations system can advance common practices of internal controls (e.g. the recent adoption of the three lines of defence model by CEB)[1] and/or a common process and procedures, the organizations recognize that it would

[1] See www.unsceb.org/content/action-risk-management-oversight-accountability-model.

seem more logical for United Nations entities, and not the Secretary-General as Chair of CEB, to develop accountability frameworks that are fit for collective impact, especially at the country level, in the context of the United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks. The accountability frameworks should collectively and individually measure their contributions to the 2030 Agenda in line with the actual targets and indicators adopted by Member States and by using country systems to track their progress to the extent possible. The organizations further note that accountability frameworks vary considerably, depending on their subject, that they should be tailored to specific circumstances and that, therefore, there cannot be one model for all.